



Surf or
Liberty

Machiel van der Stelt

Surf of Liberty

A short story by Machiel van der Stelt



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<https://pixabay.com/en/woman-underwater-diving-female-918780/>

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Surf of Liberty

Nehalennia is standing on the beach, with the wind blowing through her hair; her dog Vastwolf is running and jumping around as he wants to play with her. Nehalennia gives her beloved Vastwolf a warm hug. This coastal area with waves that hammer the beach, always causes her to think about her father, who last year went missing and never was found.

In these moments when tears start rolling down her face, she wants to cry out loud, to call for her father. But when she thinks of the idea that when she is stronger and bigger, and plans to sail a ship to look for her father, her muscles relax and she starts to breathe slower. She suddenly drops her apple she is holding in her hand, which is a chance for Vastwolf to play with it. 'What are you doing? Are you thinking about your father again? You know what happened to your father, don't you?' her mother Gerwij, suddenly calls out, behind her. 'Yes, Mother I know, but standing on the beach I always get a feeling he's still here.' Nehalennia says, wiping the tears from her cheeks.

'That's because you don't believe what happened to him. His ship sank and he drowned.' Gerwij says.

See always hates it when Gerwij says things like that, because it sounds so cold and vain. 'But don't you get that feeling he is still here?' Nehalennia says to Gerwij, while the waves continue to hammer the beach.

'Yes, sure, he is still in our minds.' Gerwij says.

Vastwolf starts to bark, while Nehalennia stares at the sea; Gerwij puts her arm around Nehalennia's shoulders. They start walking from the beach, back to their dwelling in the settlement.

Vastwolf follows them, while a big wave crashes on the beach, picking up the apple and taking it into the sea.

She has difficulty keeping up with Gerwij, as she firmly and with strong steps, ploughs through the sand to more stable ground. Nehalennia takes hold of Gerwij's hand, as if to say something, but keeps silent.

Gerwij looks down at Vastwolf who is still jumping around, 'You know we are tight with food, I wished you didn't take that dog home, I think we need to get rid of it, also I have big plans for you.' Gerwij says to Nehalennia. 'No, no, Vastwolf is a good hunter, he can help us find food and keep the rats out of our dwelling.' Nehalennia says, while wondering about the big plans her mother has for her. Could it be that her mother arranged for her to search for her father? 'He didn't get any rats, and the food he found he ate himself; tomorrow I will talk to

Weiman, he knows what to do with unwanted dogs.' Gerwij says. 'I can work for extra food.' Nehalennia replies. 'You know very well that women don't get much done, let alone a twelve year old girl like you.' Gerwij replies. 'It's not fair, I swear I can do as much as a boy can, especially when I am a bit bigger and stronger, I could sail a boat.' Nehalennia says, while remembering the couple of times she joined her father on the ship a few years back. 'Don't try to sell me again your idea of finding her father with a boat, you know that is a silly idea. A boat with a female captain will sink before it has left the harbour.' Gerwij says, pointing her finger directly at her. Nehalennia sighs in disbelief as they approach their small one room dwelling, which has a roof made of reed going from the top of the dwelling to almost to the ground. The simple wooden walls have no windows and one entrance with a wooden door. Around their dwelling is some scattered deadwood, to keep them warm during wintertime. Gerwij is devoted to her religion, so always before bedtime she will feverishly pray at her bedside, her hair shakes while she moves her head. That sight always makes Nehalennia smile, it looks like Vastwolf shaking his fur dry after a swim in the sea. Gerwij normally looks very serious after her prayers, but today is different, Gerwij smiles at Nehalennia and speaks softly yet clearly. 'I have been working on an idea, it will help us to have a better life. I have been talking to Volkoud the leader of our tribe, he wants an extra wife, I bet you would make a good wife. You get married next week.' Nehalennia's hands form tight fists and she frowns intensely at Gerwij, an urge comes to kick the hell out of her, but instead she kicks the door open with all her force, which almost breaks down., 'I miss my father and want to find him.' Nehalennia yells at her. After that Nehalennia runs out of the dwelling, through the main settlement gate and into the night, followed by Vastwolf. She eventually falls on her knees in the dunes, embracing herself, her body shocks from sobbing. When she lays down she finally falls asleep with her tears drying, while the sound of ocean waves in the background fills her dreams with peace.

The next morning at sunrise Nehalennia is woken by sand blowing in her face and by the sounds of seagulls. When she slowly opens her eyes, she can't find Vastwolf, so she quickly stands up and calls for him. When she still can't see or hear him, she starts to run to the beach where she finally sees him, running about. She calls out to him and Vastwolf comes to greet her, 'What do we do about this situation?' She ponders.

Even though Nehalennia is an obedient girl, she is also a strong and proud Frisiavones tribe member, so there is only one option for her, she has to go back to her settlement. There is less than one week left for her to arrange her official search to find her father and avoid the wedding, and wandering around the country is not an option. Nehalennia wouldn't survive the dangers lurking in the bushes; to be safe she has to go back to her settlement where the tribe members protect her. Nehalennia now realizes how far she had actually run last night as it takes her till midday to return back to her settlement. When nearing the settlement she

sees in the distance the wooden walls, which surround the settlement, and behind the five metre high walls she sees thirty dwellings spread around the compound. The gate with a one level tower on top of it, built by carefully selected wooden sticks, and neatly put in horizontal and vertical positions creates a simple yet strong wall; when she enters through the gate she tries to avoid Gerwij's dwelling. From inside the settlement Nehalennia goes quickly to the gate, over dry sandy trails which lead to the ship wharf. The ship wharf is just a beach, where ships would normally dock. This time there is only one ship on the beach, which would fit about five men and twenty baskets with goods. This ship is already unloaded, while the captain, who she doesn't recognise and who most likely isn't from her settlement, inspects the ship.

She hesitantly walks up the gangplank, 'excuse me captain?' she says.

The captain looks up, irritated, 'Yea, what?' he replies, But he gives a smile when he looks at her.

Nehalennia, gaining confidence, straightens her back, 'I am looking for my father, who trades with Britain, I am wondering if you could take me on your ship, looking for him?' she asks.

'Where and when did your father go missing?' he asks, covering his mouth with his hand to hide his smile.

'One year ago in autumn when he was en route to Gippeswic settlement in Albion,' Nehalennia says while pointing her hand to the sea in the West. 'It's better you ask the Volkoud who owns this ship.' the captain of the ship says. While he continues with his work, and Nehalennia starts to walk in the direction of Volkoud's dwelling.

Nehalennia's father was the tribe leader of their settlement before he disappeared, and was always protecting Nehalennia, and often talked to her about how she would travel the seas as he did, after she had grown up. After his disappearance, Volkoud had quickly taken the position of tribe leader.

Volkoud's dwelling is one of the biggest buildings in the settlement, and stretches at least twenty metres on each side, the dwelling can fit at least fifteen people. The main entrance is made out of heavy wood.

As there are always a lot of people going in and out, it is easy for Nehalennia to enter the dwelling unnoticed. The inside of the building is only lighted by the natural light through the windows. Inside, Nehalennia sees Ardber, she remembers that she talked to him before, but she tries to stay away from him as he has a too keen eye on her.

Ardber gives her an intense, long look, and approaches her hesitantly. 'So, so, you are eager to know where we will send you to?' he stammers. Nehalennia is surprised by Ardber's question, 'no, I am looking for your father, Volkoud, as I want to ask him something.' she says. Ardber opens his hands and shrugs, 'do you want to ask him about your new master?' he asks. Nehalennia raises her eyebrows, 'What do you mean my

master?' she replies. Ardbur shakes his head and closes his eyes to find confidence in what he is going to say. 'Don't you know? Lately my father sold a few girls secretly, so he can increase his wealth and keep peace with other tribes.' Nehalennia says while throwing her forehead 'What do you mean he sells girls?' she asks. Ardbur looks around to make sure there is nobody who can hear him, 'He sells girls to other tribes, where they live a life in slavery and never return; and he keeps it a secret from our other tribe members. Then they tell us the story, that the girls just disappeared or died.' he confides.

Nehalennia jumps backwards, stares at Ardbur, 'how do you know that and why are you telling me this?' she asks. Arberg, looks down at the ground, shuffles his right foot a bit back and forward, which creates a little track on the sandy floor in the dwelling, 'well my father is preparing me to become the tribe leader, so he told me about selling the girls, and the reason I am telling you is that I don't think it is fair for girls to be treated like that. Everybody in the tribe loves you, you are a good and smart girl with a great future ahead. Maybe you will consider being my wife when I am the tribe leader?' he finally says. After hearing this Nehalennia walks backwards to the door and runs away, followed by Vastwolf. This is the last time Arberg will ever see Nehalennia, while he envisions her in that beautiful white linen dress, which he always admires when a soft breeze gently plays with it.

Nehalennia runs into their dwelling, which is only fifty meters away from Volkoud's dwelling, as she enters their dwelling Gerwij looks up in shock. Nehalennia shouts 'I know the truth, I am going to be sold to another tribe and will never return.' 'What, what do you mean?' Gerwij stammers. Nehalennia, turns white, 'You have arranged for me to marry Volkoud, but instead I will secretly be sold as a slave to another tribe.' she says. Nehalennia's arms and hands are moving wildly when she reaches for the basket with apples and starts to fling them at Gerwij, who tries to protect her face with her arms. Nehalennia gets a big firm apple and flings it with all her might at Gerwij's head; it hits her head so hard that Gerwij immediately falls to the ground, where she lays motionless. Nehalennia, visibly shaken, stops and looks at Gerwij in shock and runs to her, shaking her 'Mother, Mother, Mother, wake up!' she screams.

Gerwij moves a bit and murmurs something, and when she finally opens her eyes, she puts her hands on her face as tears start to roll.

Slowly Gerwij starts to sit on the floor, while Nehalennia supports her. 'I am so sorry, Mother; are you hurt?' Nehalennia says. 'No, I am sorry, you know, it was very difficult when your father didn't return, and Volkoud became tribe leader, so I thought this would make it easier for both of us, but I didn't know about you going to be sold to another tribe as a slave.' Gerwij says softly. 'Now I am bigger and stronger, I can easily help.' Nehalennia says. 'Can

'you forgive me?' Gerwij says. Nehalennia thinks for a moment, 'only if you go to Volkoud and stop the wedding.' she proposes. 'But how are we going to pay Volkoud back, he gave us food in return for marrying you, oh I destroyed your life?' Gerwij exclaims and starts to cry again. Nehalennia hugs her, 'Mother, I have learned to drive a boat from Father, we just could try it; I could help Volkoud with driving the boats, to pay him back our debts, then I can also look for Father.' she says. Gerwij shrugs her shoulders while covering her face with her hands, 'I guess we could try it.' she replies.

Soon Gerwij, Nehalennia and Vastwolf are on their way to Volkoud's dwelling. Gerwij decides to go alone inside. 'Did you bring Nehalennia as agreed?' Volkoud says. 'Yes, I did bring her, she is standing outside.' Gerwij says. 'Good, so she is ready?' he asks. Gerwij, looks down, 'Well actually that's what I wanted to talk to you about, is there any way we can stop the wedding, I have also heard there are plans for Nehalennia to be sold as a slave to another tribe; to be honest I cannot see Nehalennia going to waste.' she says. Volkoud, looking questioningly, 'What do you mean she is going to be sold to another tribe as a slave?' he asks. Gerwij straightens her back 'I think you do know what I am talking about, what about if you take me instead of her?' she proposes. 'That's out of the question, you don't bear as much value as Nehalennia, we go ahead with the wedding' He says. Gerwij falls to the ground holding the feet of Volkoud, 'Please, reconsider my offer.' she pleads. Volkoud breaks away from Gerwij and orders his two men 'Check outside if you see Nehalennia and bring her in.' The men run outside and see Nehalennia standing outside, who looks shocked and runs away, pushing a few strolling tribe members out of the way, but it doesn't take long before the men catch her; they take her roughly to Volkoud. Vastwolf tries to protect Nehalennia, but he is roughly kicked away and falls under a bush whining. 'Leave me alone.' Nehalennia yells. When she is finally brought in; she sees Gerwij lying on the ground crying and pleading., 'Let me go, let me go!' Nehalennia yells again. 'You are as difficult as your father, he first agreed to transport girls for me to Britain, then he suddenly protested on the boat when returning home and started to fight with two of my men on my boat, who overpowered him, your father then fell into the water and drowned.' Volkoud yells. 'Shut up! You are lying!' Nehalennia yells again. Nehalennia sways her arms wildly and elbows the men, while stamping strongly on the men's feet, who crouch down in pain. Nehalennia gets a chance to break free from the men, and storms through the door out of the house. She runs past the bush where Vastwolf is still hiding and manages to take him with her and runs with him through the sandy trails, through the gate towards the sea, out of the settlement, passing the wharf and into the dunes.

Nehalennia and Vastwolf find a secluded area to hide for the time being. She starts to cry while tightly holding Vastwolf, and swaying backwards and forwards, as if to plead for mercy.

She hears some voices in the distance, and when she looks around the dune she recognises Volkoud and the two men, who are dragging Gerwij along. It doesn't take long before they see Nehalennia and run to her. She doesn't have enough time to run away, she fights, but the men are much stronger, she doesn't stand a chance. But luckily Vastwolf firmly bites one of the men in his arm and Nehalennia is let free. Nehalennia takes her chance to run, 'Gerwij, I am going to find Father, you know.' she yells loudly at Gerwij, with the strong wind then smothering her voice. Nehalennia knows what she needs to do as she will not survive a life as a slave. 'you go my lovely Nehalennia, give Father my love, be brave, I love you!' Gerwij yells back before a hand comes on her mouth to stop her from talking. Gerwij bends over and starts to cry, while she sees Nehalennia running over the beach into sea with Vastwolf following her; Nehalennia ends up half swimming and half running into the deeper waters of the sea, trying to get away from the beach and the men. When she is far enough in the water, she is not able to stand any more, they are both dragged by a current further out to sea. Nehalennia sees a big wave coming and dives just before it under the surface, taking Vastwolf with her.

Submerged in the wild sea water, she doesn't want to come to the surface any more because the water surrounds them and shields them from evil. Nehalennia sees tiny sand grains in the water which look like beautiful crystals when the sun rays touch them. Then it becomes black; very black before her eyes. Nehalennia still hears around her the bubbles finding their way up; when it becomes quiet, very quiet.

Nehalennia and Vastwolf have finally found Father.

The three bewildered men stand on the beach while Gerwij is on her knees, sobbing. They see a wave coming in and breaking on the beach, out rolls an apple, in front of Gerwij, who quickly picks it up, and cherishes it as if it is her own child.

When the tribe members hear about what happened to Nehalennia, they revolt against Volkoud and lynch him, naming his son Arberg as the new tribe leader. Shortly after Arberg declares Nehalennia a Goddess of the sailors, and orders a small temple to be built in honour of her. Selling girls to other tribes is outlawed, and Arberg's reign is peaceful.

Postface

Nehalennia is a Goddess who was worshipped in the Iron Age around 2 century BC in the area of the current Dutch city of Domburg in the province of Zeeland. Numerous altars were found mostly near the city of Domburg (in the old settlement of Ganuenta), some of the relics found by these altars depicted Nehalennia holding a basket with apples with a dog next to her. It is believed that Nehalennia protected the sailors from the Netherlands who traded with Albion (Great Britain).

More information can be found via the below link:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nehalennia>



Machiel van der Stelt was born and raised in the Netherlands, lived for 7 years in the United States of America and lives now in Australia. He just started out writing and this is his first short story in a series of other short stories.

It is the third century BC in the area we currently call the Netherlands, twelve year old girl Nehalennia wants to desperately look for her father, who is missing after a trade voyage between Ganuenta and Gippeswic.

But her mother has other plans, she made a secret deal with their tribe leader, which will force Nehalennia in an undesirable situation.

There is only one choice for Nehalennia to reach her goal, and that is to make a great sacrifice.

In this historical tragedy you will discover that Nehalennia's fight for gender equality is all too familiar in our modern society.

Other stories by Machiel can be downloaded for free from:
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